

Prohibitory Act

The **Prohibitory Act** was British legislation in late 1775 that cut off all trade between the American colonies and England, and removed the colonies from the King's protection.^[1] In essence, it was a declaration of economic warfare by Britain as punishment to the American colonies for the rebellion against the king and British rule which became known as the American Revolutionary War. The Prohibitory Act references two acts passed by the last session of Parliament which were known as the Restraining Acts 1775. The act is referenced as one of the 27 colonial grievances of the Declaration of Independence.

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Background

In October 1775, the Parliament of Great Britain, under Lord North, First Lord of the Treasury, decided that sterner measures would be taken to subdue the rebellion now underway in the 13 North American colonies. To this end, they decreed a blockade against the trade of the 13 colonists by passing the Prohibitory Act. "All manner of trade and commerce" would be prohibited, and any ship that was found trading "shall be forfeited to his Majesty, as if the same were the ships and effects of open enemies." The goal of the Act was to destroy the American economy by prohibiting trade with any country. The law, being a virtual declaration of war, furnished the colonists with an excuse for throwing off all allegiance to the king. John Adams regarded this act as the straw that broke the camel's back.^[2]

Effect

The Prohibitory Act served as an effective declaration of war by Great Britain; a blockade being an act of war under the law of nations. The colonies and Congress immediately reacted by issuing letters of marque that authorised individual American ship owners

Prohibitory Act

Act of Parliament



Parliament of Great Britain

Long title An act to prohibit all trade and inter-courses with the colonies of New Hampshire, Massachusetts's Bay, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, the three lower counties on Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia, during the continuance of the present rebellion within the laid colonies respectively; for repealing an act, made in the fourteenth year of the reign of his present Majesty, to discontinue the landing and discharging, lading or shipping, of goods, wares, and merchandise, at the town and within the harbor of Boston, in the province of Massachusetts's Bay;

to seize British ships in a practice known as privateering; further, the act moved the American colonists more towards the option of complete independence, as the King was now declaring his "subjects" out of his protection, and levying war against them without regards to distinction as to their ultimate loyalty or their petitions for the redress of grievances.

With the contemporaneous importation by the British of bands of foreign auxiliaries into the American colonies to suppress the rebellion by sack, pillage, fire, and the sword (the infamous Hessians), and the stirring up of hostile bands of Native Americans on the frontier by the King's men to raid the colonists, it became clear, even "self-evident" to the colonists that they would neither find liberty nor security under the King's protection, and thus, they exercised certain inalienable rights, and a rebellion turned into a war of national independence.

Reaction

It throws thirteen colonies out of the royal protection, levels all distinctions, and makes us independent in spite of our supplications and entreaties ... It may be fortunate that the act of independency should come from the British Parliament rather than the American Congress.^[3]

— John Adams

and also two acts, made in the last session of parliament, for restraining the trade and commerce of the colonies in the laid acts respectively mentioned; and to enable any person or persons, appointed and authorized by his Majesty to grant pardons, to issue proclamations, in the cases, and for the purposes therein mentioned.

Citation	16 Geo. III c.5
Territorial extent	<u>British America and the British West Indies</u>
Text of statute as originally enacted (https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=pst.000022133328&view=1up&seq=503)	

The general reaction of the colonists, or at least among Patriots, was an affirmed desire to fight back against the oppression of the British. Like Patrick Henry said, "Give me liberty or give me death!" The American people were only more united in their struggle.

References

- Gillon, S. "Congress opens all U.S. ports to international trade" (<https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/congress-opens-all-u-s-ports-to-international-trade>). *History.com*. A&E Television Networks. Retrieved 17 December 2018.
- Forman, Samuel Eagle (1922). *Our Republic: A Brief History of the American People* (<https://archive.org/details/ourrepublicbrief02form>). Century. p. 71 (<https://archive.org/details/ourrepublicbrief02form/page/71>). Retrieved 17 December 2018.
- From John Adams to Horatio Gates, 23 March 1776 (<https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Adams/06-04-02-0023>)

External links

- American Prohibitory Act (<http://www.u-s-history.com/pages/h1272.html>)
- Contemporary (1780) Text of the Act (<https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=pst.000022133328;view=1up;seq=503>)

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